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Chairman: Mr. Ballesteros (Vice-Chairman) ..... (Costa Rica)
later: Mr. Al-Bayati (Chairman) ..... (Iraq)

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In the absence of Mr. Al-Bayati (Iraq), Chairman, Mr. Ballesteros (Costa Rica), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Agenda item 63: Promotion and protection of the rights of children (*continued*) (A/61/303)

(a) Promotion and protection of the rights of children (*continued*) (A/61/41 and Corr.1 and Add.1, A/61/207, A/61/275 and Corr.1 and A/61/299)

(b) Follow-up to the special session on children (*continued*) (A/61/270)

1. **Ms. Hubard** (Suriname) said that her Government saw investment in children as an investment in sustainable human development, and was implementing policies that would guarantee the well-being of its young citizens. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Housing was the lead institution for monitoring and coordinating social policy and programmes for children. The Government also acknowledged the importance of civil society in the protection of children, particularly in the establishment of a child-abuse network aimed at eliminating violence against children. A comprehensive analysis of the social development and poverty situation of children had led to the drafting of a national policy with nine main objectives: to give priority to the policy for children, optimize their legal protection, provide health care, focus on early childhood, provide access to quality education, eliminate violence, malnutrition and exploitation, protect children and youth from HIV/AIDS, and tackle poverty. The involvement of children and young people in the design of policies concerning them was very important, and a youth parliament had been elected in 2004. Her Government looked forward to the review of progress towards "a world fit for children" in 2007.

2. **Ms. Tincopa** (Peru) said that her Government recognized that children were subjects of law, and that the State had an obligation to guarantee enforcement of the laws protecting them. Poverty eradication and reduction of social inequality were part of its strategic agenda for action, and its policies in the areas of health, education, nutrition, well-being of families and protection from violence, exploitation and abuse, along with inclusion of youth in decision-making, would benefit children. The Government was undertaking a series of measures to eradicate child sex tourism and had increased the sentences for the crime of child sexual abuse. It was launching a policy on domestic violence that would also affect children and adolescents. Peru fully endorsed the view that violence against children could never be justified and was preventable.

3. Much remained to be done in meeting commitments regarding the rights of children, and Peru was committed to pursuing its efforts. Implementation of and follow-up to the recommendations in the study on violence against children (A/61/299) were of utmost importance for each Member State. However, her delegation believed that coordination within the United Nations system was necessary, and would welcome the appointment of a special representative of the Secretary-General to promote the rights of the child on the global level (ibid., para. 120).

4. **Mr. Xhaferraj** (Albania) said that, after signing a Stabilization and Association Agreement with the European Union, Albania was striving to implement European Union standards for the promotion and protection of human rights. It had ratified the most important international instruments on the protection of children, and had initiated the ratification process for the Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Sectoral policies on violence against children were also being developed.

5. The national strategy for children stated that children had the right to special protection by the State and included measures to address child abuse, trafficking and prostitution, and child labour. A "child helpline", which provided access to a range of social services, had also been established.

6. Government policies on the promotion and protection of human rights must be complemented by extensive consultation and involvement of society at large. Government institutions had thus established cooperation with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) for the protection of the rights of the child, and their input was a constructive addition to the human-rights debate.

7. Child victims of exploitation in Albania were a legacy from past rural poverty, weak institutional decentralization, migration and lack of funds. The Government was cooperating with UNICEF and other

specialized agencies to support its efforts to protect those children. It was striving to meet the challenges of protecting its children at the national level as rapidly as possible, and was fully committed to the international effort to build a prosperous future for children worldwide.

8. **Mr. Kadiri** (Morocco) said that, although the mandate of the international community for the protection of children was clear, it was also clear that there was far to go in achieving the desired objectives. The most basic rights, the right to education and health care, were denied to millions of children, and in many regions of the world they were subjected to exploitation and suffered the consequences of armed conflict.

9. Morocco had ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1993, and since then had been engaged in harmonizing its national legislation with the Convention. In 2004, it had begun a national programme to provide school supplies and textbooks to needy pupils in primary and secondary schools. The new Labour Code also contained provisions outlawing child labour, in line with International Labour Organization Convention No. 182. The Government had also included a children's-rights component in its human-development initiative aimed at the most vulnerable groups in society, particularly in rural areas. The national action plan for children took a comprehensive approach to creating an environment where children's right to life, development, protection and participation were guaranteed.

10. **Ms. Hastaie** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that despite progress made in some areas, the goals of the special session on children, which reinforced the Millennium Development Goals, remained to be accomplished. One important issue which thus far had received little attention was the increased demand for the commercial sexual exploitation of children. A holistic approach was needed, as the demand factors went hand in hand with reasons which pushed children into that form of exploitation, varying from poverty to family disintegration to social inequality at the local level and economic disparity at the global level. Another area of concern, the situation of children in armed conflict, needed further attention, in particular the situation of Palestinian children in the occupied Palestinian territories.

11. As a party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, her country had submitted its reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child and had followed up on the Committee's concluding observations on its most recent report. It had established a national committee, with broad participation, to strengthen national planning and coordination and integrate children's interests into policies and programmes and to consider establishment of a national focal point for the promotion and protection of the rights of children.

12. Through seeking common ground, the international community should address threats to global society, especially to children, in order to foster policies, programmes and actions for their protection and promotion.

13. **Mr. Al-Hiddi** (Bahrain) said that his Government saw the protection of children as a sacred commitment, which it had honoured in part through the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. Many countries had made progress in establishing a legislative framework for children's rights, but implementation of such laws still fell short. Bahrain emphasized human-centred development, and its legislation was aimed at strengthening family ties and motherhood. It had established a national committee for children's interests and provided financial assistance to every orphan. Its efforts to improve the well-being of children also recognized the important role of women and youth in development.

14. **Mr. Grey-Johnson** (Gambia) said that his delegation found the launch of the study on violence against children (A/61/299) to be timely in refocusing the world's attention on the issue and in generating momentum for serious policy discussions. Children worldwide had been actively involved at every stage of the preparatory process, and he encouraged Member States and the United Nations system to adopt a similar approach in implementing its recommendations.

15. The Gambia expected to meet the Millennium Development Goals in the areas concerning child welfare. The Government was collaborating with UNICEF and a coalition of civil-society organizations to address violence against children comprehensively. It had also addressed the special situation of the girl child, and had established a scholarship fund for girls and created a girl-friendly school environment. In fact,

the goal of gender parity in basic education had already been achieved.

16. His delegation also welcomed the report of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict (A/61/275), and strongly urged the Special Representative to pay particular attention to the issue of psychosocial care and trauma counselling.

17. In closing, he called for a constructive, collaborative and integrated response to the reports and recommendations. The momentum generated must not be allowed to wane.

18. **Mr. Haji Yusof** (Malaysia) said that, while serious efforts must be taken by all States to ensure that children were protected from abuse and exploitation, many problems, closely related to underdevelopment, poverty and conflicts, could not be solved unless underlying developmental issues were seriously addressed and the countries concerned were provided with the necessary resources and assistance. The obstacles to achieving the goals contained in the outcome documents of the World Summit for Children and the special session included a lack of resources, debt and a decline in international funding.

19. The Government had embarked on various activities to ensure that the rights, welfare and social needs of children were addressed. The current plan of action set out a broad framework of measures to be taken by the Government in addressing the social and developmental needs of children, with a view to achieving the national goal of reaching the status of a developed nation by the year 2020. In line with that goal, the plan focused on areas relating to development, protection and participation of children, including programmes for children with disabilities. Other efforts were being explored in cooperation with the private sector and NGOs, taking into account best practices from around the world, while ensuring the preservation of Malaysia's own values.

20. The study on violence against children had illustrated the urgent need for international partnership to address the root causes of such violence, and for mechanisms to curb it. However, there was one glaring omission: the study failed to address the plight of children in the Middle East, particularly in the occupied Palestinian territories. While he welcomed the report of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict (A/61/275), he noted that it, too, had omitted reference to the plight of children in the region. A meaningful discussion of violence against children must include all children whose rights were denied owing to situations of conflict. Although Malaysia might not fully agree with some of the assessment and recommendations of the study, it was committed to the protection of children from violence, including through national legislation and international cooperation.

21. In order to ensure the protection of children, Malaysia had developed mechanisms for childcare, protection and rehabilitation, and continued to work in partnership with civil society.

22. **Ms. Banzon** (Philippines) said that her Government had recently passed a comprehensive juvenile-justice and welfare act, in response to a concluding observation made by the Committee on the Rights of the Child regarding the need for such legislation. Among other things, the new law raised the age of criminal liability, introduced a programme to deal with youth offence cases outside formal trial procedures and established a juvenile-justice and welfare council to monitor compliance with the law.

23. The Philippines had also initiated consultations and strategies on corporal punishment, HIV/AIDS, efforts to combat child pornography, and the protection of children affected by armed conflict. In addition, the month of October had been designated National Children's Month, highlighting the role of the child within the family setting, through awareness-raising activities and programmes on the various dimensions of children's lives. The Government had also intensified its implementation of the Child 21 Plan, in a comprehensive undertaking that unified the holistic approach taken by national and local government units and NGOs. Effective parenting skills, the prevention of child abuse, health care and early-childhood development were important components of the plan.

24. Expressing appreciation for the Independent Expert's study on violence against children (A/61/299), she acknowledged that there should be a conscious strategy to change mindsets and traditional practices that encouraged or condoned violence against children. The Philippines placed paramount importance on the home and family in the promotion of children's welfare, and believed the family, as the natural environment for growth and well-being of children, must be supported in order to truly nurture children and

protect them from all physical, emotional and psychological harm.

25. **Mr. Israeli** (Israel) said that the dividends from investing in children were not vague expectations, but could be witnessed as they grew and assumed roles of responsibility. In Israel, care of children began with an innovative system of prenatal care, and continued through a comprehensive education system. As to violence against children, he pointed out that children had been protected by law from corporal punishment since 2000.

26. However, child poverty remained a concern, with over one third of children living below the poverty line. A number of initiatives, including a substantial increase in child subsidies, had been established to reduce child poverty to 15 per cent within a decade.

27. Regrettably, Israeli children had grown accustomed to living under the constant threat of terrorism. Children in the southern city of Sderot and other villages in the area were under threat of rocket attacks from Hamas terrorists in the Gaza Strip. It was therefore disheartening to note that the representative of Lebanon, who had spoken the previous week, had blamed Israel for the suffering of Lebanese children. He related the aggressions committed by Hezbullah against Israel, during which one million Israelis, one third of them children, had been forced to flee their homes, and described the devastation and displacement caused to all civilians, including children, caught in the crossfire on both sides.

28. Turning to the issue of HIV/AIDS, he mentioned Israel's work with international partners in co-sponsoring workshops for childcare providers in Malawi and Zimbabwe, in order to equip them with techniques and skills to provide psychological care to young children at risk, and other efforts to improve the quality of life for children living with AIDS.

29. **Mr. Mbou-Mylondo** (Congo) said that, since ratifying the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1993, the Congo had incorporated the provisions of the Convention into its domestic legislation, in line with the great importance it attached to the promotion and protection of the rights of children, irrespective of gender. The Government had devised a national plan of action to address the objectives and recommendations of the 2005 World Summit, and a national plan for the development of the health-care system. Those action plans were implemented under the auspices of the Ministry of Social Affairs, while an inter-ministerial committee had been set up to promote the Convention, with a planning and monitoring mechanism for data collection and analysis.

30. More recently, the Government had focused on a poverty-reduction strategy; and as a result of the Congo's participation in the heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC) initiative, it had been able to allocate additional resources to development programmes for children.

31. The Government took a cross-sectoral approach to the formulation of programmes to benefit young people, including the encouragement of their role in decision-making, as exemplified in a children's parliament, whose conclusions were taken into consideration in policymaking. International support for the reconstruction of schools and health centres destroyed during the past conflict had led to a marked improvement in access to education and health care. In addition, the current national plan against HIV/AIDS placed special emphasis on the prevention of mother-child transmission and support to children orphaned by the pandemic.

32. The Congo had instituted a number of measures to protect children from abuse and exploitation, including regional initiatives and domestic legislative action, and was in the process of ratifying the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

33. **Ms. Bowen** (Jamaica) said there was no justification for the forced recruitment of children as soldiers. She noted that the report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (A/61/275) had given a reminder of the lasting effects on child perpetrators and other groups of children indirectly involved, as well as the complexities of their reintegration into society. Jamaica supported the recommendations in the report, including the need for stronger consensus and action for the enforcement of international standards for protection of affected children.

34. In response to the outcome of the special session of the General Assembly on children, Jamaica had adopted a national plan of action, appointed a child advocate, established a national human rights institution and created a juvenile unit within the police force. Some success had been achieved in the field of health care and education, such as a reduction of infant

and maternal mortality and malnutrition in the under-five population, an expanded immunization programme and increased access to drinking water.

35. **Mr. Garcia** (El Salvador) drew attention to the activities of the Salvadorian Institute for Child and Adolescent Development, which worked in a number of areas to combat child abuse and exploitation and to resolve other problems affecting children. The Institute operated protection centres and provided special care and education for street children, victims of child labour and sexual exploitation, and other children at risk.

36. Although it did not endorse all the recommendations made, El Salvador welcomed the study on violence against children (A/61/299), and hoped that it would provide a more secure basis for the development of children. The Government reaffirmed the general principles governing the protection of children, namely, non-discrimination, participation, survival and development. It agreed that additional resources were crucial to the timely achievement of the internationally agreed goals on development and poverty eradication.

37. **Ms. Wamalwa** (Kenya) said that the reports in documents A/61/41, A/61/275 and A/61/299 correctly identified that children affected by war should be an international priority. She therefore reminded the Committee about the plight of Somali children living in Somalia and in refugee camps in Kenya. Children's lives could be hard even in peaceful countries and were all the more so when the children lived far from their homes in squalid conditions made worse by persistent war. No matter what difficulties it faced, the international community must protect children and give them a semblance of normalcy. Happily, various collaborative efforts among United Nations entities and other stakeholders had had tangible results.

38. Kenya was committed to the Plan of Action entitled "A world fit for children" adopted at the special session on children. It had achieved the first step towards quality education by providing free primary education to all children. Non-formal education centres had been opened for older children; girls who had dropped out owing to pregnancy were being readmitted; more bursaries were being offered; and school feeding programmes had been intensified in arid areas. Some class sizes had doubled as a result. The increased enrolment in primary schools meant, however, that needs outstripped the capacity of the school system despite substantial Government expenditure on education.

39. The Kenyan parliament had recently enacted an important Sexual Offences Act. Mechanisms were now required, however, to ensure that it was implemented. Furthermore, female genital mutilation/cutting was now prohibited under the new Children's Act, which incorporated the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child; legislating against the practice had been a major challenge, as it was deeply rooted in the cultures of many Kenyan communities, but concerted efforts by the Government, NGOs and civil society were bearing fruit.

40. A comprehensive health-policy framework had been put in place that went beyond the primary health care recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO). However, the fight against disease remained a major challenge: child-morbidity patterns had improved only slightly, malaria and acute respiratory infections being the main fatal diseases. On a positive note, the HIV/AIDS prevalence rate had dropped, even among children.

41. The plight of parents also affected their children: improvements in children's lives could be made by reducing external debt and poverty, as well as by ending unfair global trade and protecting human rights. Children grew up thinking the world was unfair. It was time to act on the many promises made to them that their world would be safe and that they would receive an education, accessible health care and a happy life full of opportunities.

42. **Ms. Rasheed** (Observer for Palestine) said that the safety and well-being of children had been gravely endangered during the many years that the Palestinian people had been living under occupation. In the past six years, Israeli forces had killed over 900 Palestinian children. Many others had been injured, detained or orphaned. Palestinian children lived under constant threat, owing to the violence of the occupying Power. Many of the children killed were from Gaza, even after Israel's so-called disengagement.

43. Even more disturbing was that the deaths of Palestinian children at the hands of Israeli occupying forces were usually given only a cursory investigation, if any. Indictments for the killing of civilians were rare, and convictions almost unheard of. That had fostered a culture of impunity among those forces and heightened

their perception that they would not be held accountable. Given that attitude, it was unsurprising that they often shot excessively and indiscriminately.

44. A stark example of the Israeli indifference to the Palestinian child's right to life was the decision in 2005 to clear an Israeli commander of charges after he had shot an already-injured 13-year-old Palestinian schoolgirl. Occupying forces in the watchtower had quickly identified the girl, dressed in a school uniform, as "a girl of about ten". As she was running away, she had been shot and had fallen to the ground. The commander had stood directly over her body and had shot her many times. Yet he had been awarded payment of his legal expenses and had even received a promotion. The girl's family, however, had received only grief and heartache.

45. Such actions were a blatant violation of the right to life, a right which States parties must expressly recognize under the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Israel had violated numerous rights set out in the Convention and other international legal instruments, including the fourth Geneva Convention. Measures had to be taken to bring the perpetrators of such crimes to justice; otherwise the culture of impunity would grow with disastrous consequences. The situation worsened each year, and there was little room for hope. It was impossible for children to focus on their physical, emotional and social development when they faced every day the consequences of foreign occupation and a lack of even the most basic needs. Palestinian children under occupation were far from living in "a world fit for children".

46. **Mr. Rokolaqa** (Fiji) said that the Secretary-General's sobering study on violence against children (A/61/299) confirmed that such violence continued despite collective efforts to implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its two Optional Protocols. His delegation supported the recommendation to appoint a special representative on violence against children (ibid., para. 120) in order to develop a systematic framework to respond to the problem. The message was clear: no violence against children was justifiable, whether in the name of tradition, cultural or religious practices or as a form of discipline.

47. After ratifying the Convention in 1993, Fiji had established a coordinating committee on children to implement and review its national strategic plan. It had become a party to related international conventions and had signed the two Optional Protocols to the Convention. Fiji had brought its laws into line with the international conventions, and had recently reviewed laws affecting children in such areas as child protection, offences against children, evidence given by children, divorce, maintenance, custody and affiliation. The laws on sexual offences had been amended. The Fiji Police sexual offences unit provided specialized services to victims of sexual offences and child abuse, while the Director of Public Prosecution had developed an inter-agency guideline for handling victims of neglect and child abuse.

48. Professional training and dissemination of information on the rights of the child were being carried out with the help of international and non-governmental organizations. A programme funded by Australia, working with the Department of Social Welfare, was designed to develop prevention strategies.

49. The courts had ruled that all forms of corporal punishment were unconstitutional. However, attitudes towards corporal punishment remained mixed. Efforts were under way in the community to teach alternative methods of discipline.

50. The Constitution guaranteed children the right to life and an education. Children were required to attend school until the age of 15, and provision was made for a tuition fee for all children in primary and secondary schools.

51. *Mr. Al-Bayati (Iraq), Chairman, took the Chair.*

52. **Mr. Ganemtore** (Burkina Faso) said that the issue under discussion was pivotal to development. Burkina Faso was a party to many international, regional and national legal instruments for the protection of children and adolescents, and was currently implementing programmes and plans of action through technical and financial partnerships. Despite those efforts, a realistic assessment showed that the goals of the World Summit for Children were far from being attained in Burkina Faso.

53. In 2003, five million children had not yet been registered. Infant mortality remained high and severe malnutrition was widespread. Parents and educators were poorly informed about early-childhood development. In addition, there was a severe shortage of services for children of preschool age. The problem of orphans and other vulnerable children was growing,

owing to endemic family poverty, HIV/AIDS, the breakdown of the family, lack of resources for foster families and orphanages, and continuing harmful traditional practices. Adolescents were often the victims of injustice and violence, trafficking and prostitution. In the countryside, school attendance was poor.

54. Burkina Faso, in an effort to devote greater attention to children, was developing a broad strategy for the next 10 years. The strategy was designed to promote preschool education and to address children's needs in many fields. It would also promote good parenting, publicize the rights of the child, the woman and the family, work on changing attitudes to remove discrimination within families, and seek to limit the school-dropout rate. Young people would be encouraged to participate in decision-making through a youth parliament. Programmes to protect vulnerable children would involve information campaigns supported by action on the ground and the punishment of offenders. With stronger community and family structures, communities could play a larger role in caring for those children. Thus, in keeping with the Secretary-General's recommendations, Burkina Faso was doing its part to make the world a better place for children.

55. **Mr. Abdul Azeez** (Sri Lanka) said that the 2005 World Summit had focused attention on the use of children in armed conflict and on violence against children, and had called for more effective efforts to prevent those abuses. The study of the Independent Expert on violence against children (A/61/299) — which represented a milestone — highlighted the many factors that engendered violence in the home, school, workplace and community and pointed out the factors that impeded a child's potential development. In paragraph 93 of the study, the Expert had outlined the principles underlying his conclusions and recommendations. The strength of the study was its positive, non-intrusive, content-based approach to the issues. His delegation attached great importance to those principles and supported the Expert's recommendations.

56. The question of children and armed conflict was of critical concern to Sri Lanka, given that it had been afflicted by violence and terrorism by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) for almost two decades. The report on children and armed conflict (A/61/275) provided a poignant narrative of the impact of armed conflict on children. It was indeed time to live up to the promises the world community had made to children. Sri Lanka reaffirmed its commitment to do so despite the many constraints placed on the Government by the LTTE.

57. Sri Lanka urged the LTTE to take verifiable, concrete measures to cease the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict and to help create an atmosphere free of violence against children. The LTTE had promised to do so in 1996 and in 2003 had again made a binding commitment by signing a plan of action. Those assurances remained unfulfilled. The LTTE had intensified its recruitment drive in flagrant violation of the plan of action and international law. If the LTTE failed to release all children in its control, it was time to consider punitive action.

58. Sri Lanka had established a monitoring and reporting task force in response to Security Council resolution 1612 (2005), on the use of child soldiers, and welcomed the visit of the special adviser of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, to take place in November 2006. The Government would give him full cooperation, including access to all areas of the country, and trusted that he would take the opportunity to make the LTTE fulfil its commitment to end the use of children in armed conflict and agree to a human rights framework that respected the rights of children and other democratic freedoms.

59. **Ms. G/Mariam** (Ethiopia) said that the Secretary-General's report on follow-up to the special session (A/61/270) had highlighted the progress made in health, education, and protection for children as well as the challenges to promoting the welfare of children posed by such problems as weak links between plans and budgets, lack of capacity, natural disasters and the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Ethiopia believed that a stronger poverty-reduction programme could go far in improving the situation of children, who largely bore the brunt of poverty. In turn, a child who was nurtured, loved and educated would become a responsible citizen.

60. Ethiopia had begun taking concrete measures, including the implementation of a national plan of action that included children as stakeholders. It had strengthened regional and national child-rights committees, and had instituted programmes to address orphans and vulnerable children and prevent the

commercial exploitation of children. A plan for civil registration and a vital-statistics system was awaiting parliamentary approval. Childhood-poverty reduction had been incorporated into national poverty-reduction strategies. The Government's new five-year plan would focus on education and health. The Government would cover 60 per cent of the budget required to implement the plan, and a new Ministry of Women's Affairs would take over responsibility for coordinating children's issues.

61. The Government's efforts to attain the Millennium Development Goals had led to increased primary-school enrolment, and special programmes had been set up to reach children in rural areas. Health-care services had increased and the immunization rate now exceeded 40 per cent.

62. The Constitution guaranteed the protection of children against exploitation and abuse, the right to care from parents and guardians, and protection from corporal punishment in schools and childcare facilities. The Penal Code had been amended to make abduction, trafficking, exploitation, abuse and female circumcision criminal acts. Amendments to the Family Code set the minimum age for marriage and regulated such matters as custody and inheritance.

63. Yet much remained to be done to protect children's rights in Ethiopia. Poverty, lack of resources and natural disasters continued to pose serious challenges. With support from the international community, however, Ethiopia believed it would be able to register further achievements in the future.

64. **Mr. Desta** (Eritrea) said that his country had a long-standing commitment to improving the welfare of children. It was a party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and had adopted measures to give effect to children's rights. The Government had made considerable efforts to meet the basic needs of children through initiatives such as the integrated early-childhood development programme. It had improved access to health services, with wide coverage of immunization and control of malaria and other diseases, thereby reducing infant and under-five mortality; and had greatly increased the school population. The Government had also made food security a top priority to combat poverty and malnutrition.

65. Through the Government's policy of rehabilitation, empowerment was provided to all vulnerable groups to enable them to become productive members of society. While the condition of children in situations of armed conflict was improving considerably, their protection, rehabilitation and development in conflict and post-conflict situations still needed to be highlighted in policies and programmes of Governments and the international system.

66. **Ms. Diallo** (Mali) said that her country had fulfilled part of its commitment to safeguard the rights of the child through a series of national, regional and international measures. Nationally, the measures included promotion of quality education, with a big increase in the education budget; a national solidarity fund to sponsor children from poor communities; a hygiene and sanitation policy aimed at reducing the risk factors for children's health; protection of children against abuse, exploitation and violence; a children's parliament; and an inter-ministerial committee for the implementation of the national action plan.

67. At the regional level, Mali was party to the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, while on the international scene, it had ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols and other United Nations instruments related to the rights of the child. Mali had also fulfilled its commitments through other measures, including combating child labour; setting up an appropriate setting for meeting with children; establishing an official travel document for children; calling for an end to the practice of genital mutilation; raising public awareness of children's issues; combating begging and fighting cross-border trafficking in children through bilateral and multilateral agreements.

68. **Mr. Belinga Eboutou** (Cameroon) said that the lives of children in many parts of the world, especially in Africa, were filled with suffering, hopelessness and insurmountable obstacles. However, there was renewed hope with the 1990 World Summit for Children and the decision of Heads of State at the special session to build "a world fit for children". The Plan of Action adopted by the Heads of State had four key objectives: promoting healthy lives; providing quality education; protecting against abuse, exploitation and violence; and combating HIV/AIDS.

69. The international community had a moral duty to honour its commitments, while individual States had to do their part by developing appropriate child policies.

In that regard, Cameroon had ratified almost all international instruments relating to the rights of the child, passed laws with specific provisions on children with disabilities and instituted the principle of free primary education. It had also launched an action programme based on the recommendations of the World Summit for Children, which included the following priorities: protecting children's rights in early childhood; developing basic education for all children; providing access to drinking water; reforming the health system; combating HIV/AIDS among mothers and children; protecting children in difficult circumstances and promoting social education.

70. **Ms. Reiner Barnes** (Observer for the Sovereign Military Order of Malta) said that the Order of Malta would continue to improve and expand its programmes to children in Palestine, Afghanistan and elsewhere. It also made it a priority to increase awareness of the rights of children and to see that those rights were respected and implemented. In the north of Gujarat, India, for example, the Order provided preschool education and a daily meal to children from the so-called untouchable castes that were traditionally discriminated against. In Thailand, where unaccompanied and separated children, including those orphaned by AIDS, were too often exposed to poverty and hardship, the Order had been operating a large-scale basic health-care project in remote mountain villages to address the growing HIV/AIDS pandemic and provide health-care services. The Order also provided them with an allowance for milk, food, school uniforms and books.

71. In the case of children affected by armed conflict, the signing of the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict was encouraging, but not enough to address the problem. On the other hand, the Order was encouraged to see that the vast majority of nations had committed themselves to the goals laid out in the final document of the special session, entitled "A world fit for children".

72. **Mr. Buff** (Observer for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)) noted that there was currently a significant drive to turn international child-protection standards into reality on the ground. He said that the fate of children affected by war, especially children associated with armed forces, was of particular concern to ICRC. He welcomed the specific focus placed by the United Nations on the issue of recruitment of children into armed forces and armed groups, but stressed that working for the rehabilitation and reintegration of those children required commitment over time. It also required close collaboration with local communities and long-term vision, planning, commitment and funding. With regard to children separated from their parents as a result of armed conflict, ICRC worked with them from the very outset of the conflict. In that work, it collaborated closely with other child-protection agencies and national authorities. He emphasized, however, that working with such children also required a long-term commitment and long-term funding.

73. **Mr. Nawfal** (Lebanon), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that Lebanon condemned all forms of terrorism and killing of civilians, especially children, regardless of denomination, race, or nationality. His country had become the victim of the ultimate form of terrorism, namely State terrorism, which Israel had long exercised by its continued occupation of Lebanese lands for more than 28 years. Hezbullah was only a reaction against oppression: it was a popular resistance movement in response to Israeli oppression and occupation of Lebanese lands.

74. Even though Lebanon deplored the loss of any single civilian life, any single child from any and all sides, it was striking to note that Israel had killed approximately 1,200 Lebanese citizens, 1,150 of whom were civilians, and one third were children. Lebanese children were still being killed and maimed by the one million bomblets — designed to look like toys or candy — that Israel had systematically and criminally targeted on the homes, farms and schools. Most had been launched during the last days of hostilities.

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.